

Accessing care records transcript

00:00:03 Augusta Itua

Hi.

00:00:04 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Hello.

00:00:05 Augusta Itua

In conversation with Doctor Julia Feast. Today I am delighted to have a conversation with Doctor Julia Feast with a background as a social worker, researcher and expert in policy and practice development.

00:00:23 Augusta Itua

Dr Feast is recognised as a key knowledge source advocating for improved access to records for care experience people and adopted people, thank you. And I am Augusta Itua, a children rights lawyer and legal consultant at Columbus. So my first question, Julia, throughout your career, what has consistently motivated you and driven you to advocate for assisted care records for adopted and care experienced people?

00:00:55 Dr Julia Feast OBE

That's a very good question. I've been around for a very, very long time.

00:00:59 Dr Julia Feast OBE

So I've had decades of working with children and families, but maybe has always been with children who care for children in need or preventative work, and less so adopted. That's mostly preventing children from being adopted at the beginning. There's always been a passion of mine from a very early stage. I realised that lots of people in care

00:01:19 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And adopted people weren't getting the information they needed to make sense themselves, so it became very early on for me.

00:01:26 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But my I suppose the biggest thing that really changed me was when I was working at another organisation and I was seeing adopted adults.

00:01:35 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And and she lived in a family.

00:01:38 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Who adopted her, who loved her.

00:01:39 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Very much felt very loved and they were very short in height. They had brown hair and brown eyes and she was completely opposite, very tall blue eyes, bare skinned and she had a passion for dogs. And her parents didn't like animals.

00:01:57 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But when we went through her records and and and read through and heard that the mother's her birth mother.

00:02:04 Dr Julia Feast OBE

She couldn't believe it because in so many similarities, and then we finished. She just says to me, I feel as I've been living in a darkened room and someone switch the light on. And that was really powerful for me. But because we're brought up in families who we know, we get donations from when you're not brought up with a

00:02:20 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Family that you were born into, you could be very, very different and there could be huge gaps.

00:02:25 Augusta Itua

Thank you, Julia. I also believe this is a very important topic. I having reflected on my own experience and also on the experience of young people, children, young adults and practitioners.

00:02:40 Augusta Itua

That I have engaged with it. It has become clear to me that this is an often overlooked area and this is really what motivated me to apply for The Churchill Fellowship.

00:02:51 Augusta Itua

To give me the funds that I need to look into this in more depth and to dedicate some more time looking at this since joining CoramBAAF and also having the opportunity to meet some experts leading experts in this area, I've been fortunate to learn more about.

00:03:12 Augusta Itua

About it, but.

00:03:13 Augusta Itua

Also, I have had asked for advice line service which has enabled me to really see how, in practical terms many barriers they are built in terms of disclosing this information, but also in terms of ccessing this infoRMATION.

00:03:30 Augusta Itua

And now I really just find myself in in a prime position and to be able to utilise the Churchill Fellowship network, but also the contacts that I've made in this past month, but also through current to look into this area and to give more and see how I could be helpful when it comes to the work that's already happening with the very, very valuable work.

00:04:04 Augusta Itua

So moving on to the next question.

00:04:06 Augusta Itua

Can you explain what are the main issues are what the challenges that adopted and care experienced people face when trying to access their records?

00:04:18 Dr Julia Feast OBE

This was one of the biggest challenges, is the first thing has been having information to know that records may exist, not always that have been destroyed for some reason, but they should be records somewhere about the person's time in care and definitely if someone's been adopted.

00:04:33 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Although things can be destroyed absolutely too, so is having that information available easily. That should really be told through the carers your doctor, parents. But if not, they should be easily found. But it's also having the support and services and over the years they're diminishing and.

00:04:51 Dr Julia Feast OBE

You can really see it because people don't understand.

00:04:54 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Always that it's not just about placing children for care to their childhood. It is a lifelong issue and that things reverberate across the lifespan and issues that come up that need to be addressed. So it's important they have support, they have information, and there's advice.

00:05:11 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Around and that they have got the services that they really need.

00:05:17 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And of course, the other big thing is legislation. That legislation needs to be fit for purpose, and I know we may talk about that, but there are differences between people being adopted and people living in care about what sort of information they can get and how they get it. And the legislative framework that's used, yeah.

00:05:35 Augusta Itua

Absolutely. And from a legal perspective, it does appear that there seems to be a teacher system in.

00:05:43 Augusta Itua

In both the assets and the support those available for both care experienced people and for the people, which better legally protect rights for adopted people in comparison to care experienced people.

00:06:02 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Collects the whole area because people have been in care, have to access information via the data protection rules, whereas Dr people can access information via the 1983 adoption agency regulations.

00:06:18 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And the DPA. There's a lot of concern about third party information that information that maybe their parents, their siblings and other people in their lives that because DPA people always say they can't give out information about third party, which can be very, very.

00:06:33 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Restrictive and means that many people living in care would end up with information has been given out from the agency has blanked out throughout because they're afraid, or think is this third party and they can't have it.

00:06:46 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Whereas in adoption, the adoption agencies are can use their discretion about what information they can give to the adopted person which can be identified or not identified is fine.

00:06:58 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But that doesn't mean to say that some has an ultimate right. Either this is it's quite complicated, but the important thing is that we need legislation for both purposes of both groups. The doctor give them care and care. Legislation needs to be sought as a matter of urgency, really, that he's been been campaigning about this in years and years and.

00:07:18 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Would be lovely if it happens one of those.

00:07:19 Augusta Itua

Things you know.

00:07:21 Augusta Itua

Whilst all of this work is happening.

00:07:23 Augusta Itua

There are already things that can be put in place in terms of I listen to so we can record and she was mentioning how some archives are starting to some blackouts like grey outs. And I don't, like, I mean that's more for our countries, but I'm just thinking about social workers in their day-to-day practice, can they be thinking about which then will have the most lasting impact The moment it gets recorded?

00:07:54 Dr Julia Feast OBE

I suppose it's about when you put what you need to work. Even though we're going to start out sometime and what's really crucial is that you have resources to help you develop that learning. You're going to to, to gain and to use.

00:08:08 Dr Julia Feast OBE

It in a way that you.

00:08:09 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Can make sure it's put back into practice and policy to make sure you're always getting right for people as needed.

00:08:15 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Training. I mean social workers did training, they need support in adoption. For example, there's lots of training and accessing information, disclosing information records in pre and post commencement, two separate things that you can d. And also care records too. I mean I've done some training around that about what could you give.

00:08:35 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And I suppose this practice guide gives an insight into what information can be disclosed even when it's policy information, because social workers and access to care records were get concerned about this third party information. But people must remember that offer names.

00:08:56 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Of people's brothers and sisters, except that will be registered.

00:08:59 Dr Julia Feast OBE

They'll be under the births, marriages and deaths they can find information publicly through records. So that is not confidential because it can be found. But.

00:09:09 Dr Julia Feast OBE

It it is.

00:09:12 Dr Julia Feast OBE

It is a complex area for social workers who deal with that need to have the support and guidance that developing the skills and information and confidence they're going to need to not be afraid to help people understand their lives, and who they are and where they come from, you know.

00:09:32 Augusta Itua

Absolutely, because at the moment it does say that there is almost an adversity towards disclosing information, so reflective queries that we get very often is can I discuss this information? There is third party information here and quite often.

00:09:50 Augusta Itua

You can. You can see that's the natural instinct is to not disclose the information for fear of reaching any of the regulations in any of the laws. So my understanding of this guide is that it is an enabling tool that social workers can use to access, to, to.

00:10:10 Augusta Itua

Guide them to provide access to information so everything you just said is absolutely spot on in terms of that enabling that approach, yeah.

00:10:25 Dr Julia Feast OBE

People mustn't be afraid to disclose this information. But he mustn't do it in isolation either. You do need to understand the law, but you also need to have agreement that that is appropriate to give that information.

00:10:40 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But there should be very good reasons why you don't, and there have been judgements along those lines, particularly adoption. You know, why shouldn't you give this?

00:10:48 Dr Julia Feast OBE

This information, who is it going to harm?

00:10:52 Dr Julia Feast OBE

So they've got to be encouraged or certain questions, but at the same time, we have to respect other people's privacy too. So it's a really fine balance, but.

00:11:02 Dr Julia Feast OBE

If you were brought up in a family that you're born into, you may well have access to their history in your lives. Imagine not getting that. And if that information can help them in that area how crucial is that?

00:11:15 Augusta Itua

That leads me to the next question. How are you addressing these issues? I know you do lots of work across research, policy and practice development. I would love to talk this through.

00:11:29 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Unfortunately not going to be enough time doing this as a podcast today, so I have to be very quick and brief so there's a lot more I could say, but for example, with care we have the access to care, access to care.

00:11:43 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Records campaign group and that's been going for some years now and we have been campaigning for years about changing legislation, but also good policies and practices that exist in local authority, along with CLA and other partners too,

00:11:59 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And that's still going. We have a website and we are not giving up. We're still going. We have Lola Young who supports us, which is fantastic.

00:12:07 Dr Julia Feast OBE

So we have that.

00:12:10 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But we also have more recently we've got the local the chief archives and the local governments, which is a group of archivists but with a subgroup of that.

00:12:24 Dr Julia Feast OBE

and they've been able to get funding and we call ourselves the archives and records group.

00:12:30 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Records through they would be.

00:12:31 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Able to get.

00:12:32 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Funding so that they can.

00:12:34 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Look into and find out where records are held. It's probably been started because it's concerned the adoption records could be destroyed in 1926, a hundred years after they were allowed to do it, but so this was going on. While the last year and we have other Members as.

00:12:55 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And more work is built on the mirror projects, which has done an enormous amount of.

00:12:59 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Research into people in care.

00:13:02 Dr Julia Feast OBE

About their information needs and how we need to improve them. This and it also has the the access to care with this campaign group, the CLA, so.

00:13:12 Augusta Itua

And just to specify CLA is the Care Leavers Association.

00:13:17 Dr Julia Feast OBE

So together we, you know.

00:13:19 Dr Julia Feast OBE

We tried to say with.

00:13:22 Dr Julia Feast OBE

There are archives group the.

00:13:23 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Little group they'll they'll receive funding and they've got consultants Kevin Bolton.

00:13:30 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And associates and they are doing a piece of work at the moment where they're contacting every local authority and organisation in England and Wales to find out where adoption records, but also where care records are held too and what sort of records and what format. Because it's not just about where records are held, it's about retention.

00:13:50 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Schedules that systems are in place to support that, so that's a big project and they and will finish hopefully in November 23. So they're enormous amount of work in a very short space of time.

00:14:01 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But I hope you won't finish there.

00:14:03 Dr Julia Feast OBE

There's so much.

00:14:04 Dr Julia Feast OBE

More to do.

00:14:04 Augusta Itua

Yeah, we've had. We've been very lucky to also have a learning research session with Sarah Whickam, who has been a lot of work along with alongside yourself on this and.

00:14:17 Augusta Itua

I would invite everyone to go and listen to it because it's brilliant.

00:14:21 Dr Julia Feast OBE

The other thing that's going to be an outcome from the archives group is that they're going to produce guidelines about retention policies and would help the guidance to our service and other people, the workers in in, in such organisations that records are held. So that's going to.

00:14:36 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Be another resource but we do need more funding in most areas, but that's not all.

00:14:41 Augusta Itua

They say yeah, thank you so much. And building on that, I'd like to also offer some insight into my Churchill Fellowship. I have plans to visit Australia and maybe the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, just because I've identified.

00:14:59 Augusta Itua

Those countries are examples where there is a lot of thinking and a lot of policy, policy and practise reform around this area, so I would be very keen.

00:15:12 Augusta Itua

To share my learn upon my return, I plan to travel in February and also to see.

00:15:21 Augusta Itua

How that can contribute to any work that is already happening in the UK, specifically in England, Wales.

00:15:28 Augusta Itua

So my final question for you, Julia. What's on the horizon? What's next?

00:15:34 Dr Julia Feast OBE

There are lots of possibilities. It's always as those guided by how much fun do you get. But with the adoption side, because although we've had the legislation adoption through adults.

00:15:44 Dr Julia Feast OBE

From pre commencement and post commencement.

00:15:46 Dr Julia Feast OBE

There's lots to be sorted out for both both of them and regulations.

00:15:50 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Need to be tweaked and in.

00:15:53 Dr Julia Feast OBE

February this year, along with the auspices of universities, ganglia, and with the RAAS, we have been production agencies. We've started a new project called improving Adoption Services for adults and our aim is really to to look at.

00:16:00 Augusta Itua

Regional adoption agency.

00:16:14 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Not what's working.

00:16:14 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But isn't working.

00:16:15 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But also to produce a new practice guides for social workers who work with adoption managers too.

00:16:23 Dr Julia Feast OBE

And and to find out how things could be improved as well. So it's an ongoing project, but it should be finishing next year sometime. So hopefully it will have a website soon and information will be.

00:16:35 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Right on that.

00:16:37 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But also a bit of care stuff already from CoramBAAF as you probably know more on that they've published.

00:16:42 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Access to care requisite for people, but professionals who work with people in care to give them some information about how what records can be shared.

00:16:52 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Yeah, to think a bit outside the box a.

00:16:54 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Bit to make sure.

00:16:54 Augusta Itua

We actually have a copy of it today here, yeah.

00:16:57 Dr Julia Feast OBE

That's right. Yeah. So it it, it has ten base, all sorts of things and that was published in 2022 is only last year. So that's a good thing.

00:17:10 Dr Julia Feast OBE

The Access to Care Records mirrors are still working and we have the Family Connect website which has been excellent and it provides.

00:17:16 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Information both people have been the care care experience also adopted people about their their rights, where they can get information from.

00:17:25 Dr Julia Feast OBE

But it's only a starter we can build on that and it's for example, if you are able to get more funding, for the archives group where we find out where these records are held. We know we

have the adoption search for Union website that's held by CoramBAAF, which means you could find out where records might be held.

00:17:41 Dr Julia Feast OBE

For adoption but we don't have that for people who didn't care, and ideally we'd like to follow Australia and have something similar here if we can.

00:17:49 Augusta Itua

Absolutely. Thank you very much. And as you mentioned, Australia, like I said earlier, I shall keep myself and you want actually interested updated about my discoveries plan to meet with some of the archives who were involved in setting up the systems that are now in place with the find and connect service in Australia. Thank you so much Julia, for making the time to be here with us.

00:18:17 Augusta Itua

Today, and also for just making the space to talk about this very, very important issue that affects the life of many care experienced people and adopted people as well, yeah.

00:18:30 Dr Julia Feast OBE

Thank you. Thank you.